CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

For students who have sat for their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) examinations, the big question they ask is "What next?" As the completion of formal education draws near, many students have no clear definite ideas of what they would do next.

STPM students will have plans to find a place at one of the several institutions of higher learning in the country. Teachers and career counsellors play an important role in assisting these students make the right career and academic decisions.

As the purpose of going to the sixth form is to prepare for the final lap in their education process before going to the colleges and universities, students should have all the relevant information necessary regarding the types of programmes and courses offered by those colleges and universities. Equipped with sufficient relevant information pertaining to what each college and university offers, students can then consider what they want for their career in future.

Research has indicated that in the past, about 80% of those entering the first year of study at the local universities have no idea as to what career to pursue after graduation. (The Sun, November 17, 1996). Although these STPM students can do nothing to change the outcome of the STPM examination, they can still explore every aspect of the career

that might interest them. Those who are very interested in getting a place at any of the universities could start by thinking of their interests and abilities. Having identified their interests and abilities, they should then try to decide which college or university suits them, and what courses to apply for.

Setting goals is the first major step to a successful academic pursuit that could lead to a successful career. Failure to make an appropriate decision regarding their areas of interest and the courses to meet their future goals will land students in difficulties once they enter the university.

It is unwise of students to simply listen and blindly follow what others advise them to do. They must make that decision personally based upon their personal interest and ability. Some students blindly follow the advice of their parents, teachers and friends and then find themselves not interested in the programmes and courses they are in. This may lead to frustration and eventually, distress. Therefore, it is advisable for all students especially sixth form students seeking admission to colleges or universities to make a wise decision pertaining to their areas of study they would like to pursue and which fits their career or vocational interests.

Taking vocational tests such as the Self-Directed Search (SDS) by Holland may help students know their career/vocational interests and determine what programme and courses they should choose. The test would also assist students to find the best areas of study to match their vocational interests. The chances of achieving greater heights in their studies are greater than those who are uncertain of their interests and

aptitude. It would be much easier for them to follow courses of their interest rather than forcing themselves to study something that does not interest them, which would eventually lead to distress.

The SDS test would thus enable a student to know their vocational personality and then proceed to make the appropriate decision consistent with their interests. In fact, it is best that students make their career choice prior to sitting for their examination. Thus, it is advisable for Lower Six students to take the SDS test early as knowing what interests them would enable them to pay more attention and concentrate on the subjects that can guarantee them a place in the course of study they are interested in.

1.2 Theoretical Background

In 1959, John L. Holland outlined a theory of vocational choice, which he expanded in 1966 and called a theory of vocational behaviour and modified again in 1973, renaming it a theory of careers. Holland (1966) described interests and vocational preferences as expression of personality and referred to his theory as both a theory of vocational life and a theory of personality.

Development of vocational interests or emergence of a resemblance to one of six personality types is a result of the environment modelling and reinforcing certain behaviours.

Following are the six Holland's types as they relate to interests:

1. Realistic: Realistic people are interested in action-type occupations such as building, mechanics, machine operator and repair. They tend to like the outdoors and prefer to work in rural areas. Typical hobbies are

fishing, camping and working on cars. Some realistic occupations include carpenter, rancher, engineer, forester, veterinarian and welder.

2. Investigative: People with high scores in investigative abilities have a strong interest in science. They like abstract tasks and solving problems while working independently. Such activities as collecting data, conducting research and organising material for analysis appeal to investigative people. Some investigative occupations include biologist, mathematician, psychologist, pharmacist and dental hygienist.

3. Artistic: The artistic person values the aesthetics in life and is dedicated to self-expression. Typical work activities are writing, composing and designing while working independently. Work environments include museums, theatres, galleries and concert halls. Examples of artistic occupations include artist, music teacher, librarian, photographer and interior designer.

4. Social: Social people enjoy working with people and are concerned for the welfare of others. Typical activities are informing, teaching, coaching and leading discussions. Work environments include social service agencies, religious establishments, mental health clinics, personnel offices and medical facilities. Examples of social occupations include teacher, guidance counsellor, playground director, social worker and juvenile probation officer.

5. Enterprising: Enterprising people tend to be ambitious and competitive and to seek leadership positions. Typical activities include selling, managing, giving speeches and leading groups of people. Work environments include marketing agencies, investment banking firms, retail and wholesale firms, and small, independently owned businesses.

Examples of occupations include corporation executive, sales manager, elected public official, computer salesperson and stockbroker.

6. Conventional: Being precise and accurate while attending to detail in well-defined activities are typical traits of conventional people. Activities included in this type are keeping records, scheduling and maintaining adopted procedures of an organisation. Preferred work environments include large corporations, business offices and accounting firms. Examples of occupations include bookkeeper, accountant, secretary, key-punch operator, cashier and banker.

Holland suggested that the six types can be arranged around a hexagon in an R-I-A-S-E-C order, as illustrated in Figure 1, and that types adjacent to one another are more related than are types diametrically opposed to one another on the hexagon.

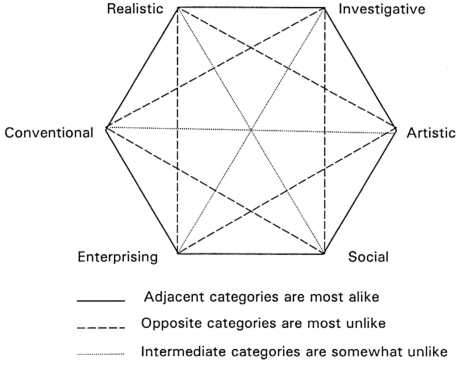

Figure 1 : The psychological resemblance among types (Weinrach, 1979)

1.2.1 Background Principles

Holland's career typology theory of vocational behaviour is developed based on the following principles:-

(i) The choice of a vocation is an expression of personality

Vocational preferences are sometimes moderately correlated with personality and originality scales (Holland, 1963), self-ratings of ability and personality traits and life goals (Baird, 1970), parental attitudes (Medvene, 1969) and many other psychological and sociological variables. For many years, writers have suggested the need for a more comprehensive view of vocational preferences and interests:

"Interest inventory scores are measures of self-concept" (Bordin, 1943)

"Vocational interest measurement is a special case in personality theory" (Darley and Hagenah, 1955)

"Vocational choice is a development process and the implementation of a person's self-concept" (Super, 1972)

The above orientations imply that people's vocational interests flow from their life history and personality.

If vocational interests are construed as an expression of personality, then they represent the expression of personality in work, school subjects, hobbies, recreational activities and preferences. In short, "vocational interests" are an important aspect of personality.

(ii) Interest inventories are personality inventories

If vocational interests are an expression of personality, then it follows that interest inventories are personality inventories.

A person's responses to apparently neutral content (vocational interests and activities) could be interpreted as expressions of various dimensions of personality.

"The choice of an occupation is an expressive act which reflects the person's motivation, knowledge, personality and ability. Occupations represent a way of life, an environment rather than a set of isolated work functions or skills ... (Holland, 1977,p.5)

Therefore, the content of vocational interest inventories provides scales whose reliabilities and validities approximate those obtained for other methods for assessing personality.

(iii) Vocational stereotypes have reliable and important psychological and sociological meanings

Most interest inventories rest heavily on the assumptions that people perceive occupations and their associated activities accurately and that these perceptions remain the same over long periods of time. In the same way, a person's vocational preferences and choices rest on the same assumptions.

If perceptions of occupations had no validity, interest inventories would have little or no validity and the average person would have great difficulty in selecting suitable jobs.

(iv) Members of a vocation have similar personalities and similar histories of personal development

If a person enters a given vocation because of a particular personality and history, it follows that each vocation attracts and retains people with similar personalities.

Laurent's (1951) study of engineers, physicians and lawyers documents the similarities in life histories for the members of a vocation. Other studies by Roe (1956), Kulberg and Owens (1960), Chaney and Owens (1964), Nachmann (1960) and Eberhardt and Muchinsky (1982) also support this assumption.

(v) Because people in a vocational group have similar personalities, they will respond to many situations and problems in similar ways and they will create characteristic interpersonal environments

Astin and Holland (1961) were able to predict what college students would say about their college and about fellow students. In one study, they found that the percentage of students in the realistic group was correlated with a student's description of the college and its students as pragmatic rather than humanistic. Other studies (Astin, 1968; Richards, Seligman, and Jones, 1970) have validated these ideas in large-scale analyses of educational environments.

(vi) Vocational satisfaction, stability and achievement depend on the congruence between one's personality and the environment in which one works

We are more likely to perform well at a vocation in which we "fit" psychologically. Vocational interest inventories are based

in part on this assumption. Vocational literature is filled with evidence that supports this assumption. In the present theory, the congruence of person and environment is defined in terms of the structure of personality types and environmental models. Thus, a congruent or fitting environment is one in which a person's preferred activities and special competencies are required, and his or her personal disposition and its associated characteristics – a special outlook on the world, role preferences, values and personal traits – are reinforced.

1.2.2 Working Assumptions

Four working assumptions constitute the heart of the theory. They indicate the nature of the personality types and environmental models, how the types and models are determined and how they interact to create the phenomena – vocational, educational and social – that the theory is meant to explain.

Firstly, most persons can be categorised as one of six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising or conventional. The description of each type (see 1.2) is both a summary of what we know about people in a given occupational group and a special way of comprehending this information. It is a theoretical or ideal type. Each type is the product of a characteristic interaction among a variety of cultural and personal forces such as peers, biological heredity, parents, social class and the physical environment. Out of this experience, a person learns first to prefer some activities as opposed to other. Later, these activities become strong interests. Such interests lead to a special group of competencies.

Secondly, there are six model environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. Each environment is dominated by a given type of personality and is typified by physical settings posing special problems and opportunities. Because different types have different interests, competencies and dispositions, they tend to surround themselves with special people and materials and to seek out problems that are congruent with their interests, competencies and outlook on the world.

The third assumption states that people search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles. The person's search for environment is carried on in many ways, at different levels of consciousness, and over a long period of time.

Lastly, behaviour is determined by an interaction between personality and environment. If we know a person's personality pattern and the pattern of his or her environment, we can, in principle, use our knowledge of personality types and environmental models to forecast some of the outcomes of such a pairing. Such outcomes include choice of vocation, job changes, vocational achievement, personal competence, and educational and social behaviour.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Holland's theory of vocational choice implies that personal stability, achievement and satisfaction increase when individuals select occupational environments consistent with their personality orientations. Also, interest inventories can help to identify those educational and

vocational areas in which an individual's aptitude and abilities may be developed through academic training.

Holland's theory proposes that people behave in accordance with the characteristics of one of six major personality styles and that these styles influence their vocational decisions. Vocational interests, therefore, give a person valuable information that could be used to explore occupational alternatives.

Career counsellors and vocational educators may wish to make more systematic use of interest measures as they work with sixth form students who face choices regarding vocational programmes or courses of study. If interpretations of interest scores can be keyed to clusters of locally available courses of study, students could easily identify programmes in which they may experience satisfaction and success.

Bernard and Naylor (1982) in proposing a model for the delivery of vocational guidance services in secondary schools, reviewed research concerning the unique contributions made by measures of vocational interests in the career counselling setting. For those students who have a definite occupational choice, interest inventory scores may serve as confirmation of choices already made.

Therefore, it is the aim of this study to identify the vocational interests of form six Arts students by using the Self-Directed Search (SDS) constructed by Holland and translated by Amla Hj. Salleh (1984) into Bahasa Melayu.

1.4 Research Questions

Research questions that will be used to measure the vocational interests of form six Arts students are as follows:-

(i) What are the vocational interests of form six Arts students?

(ii) Are there any differences in the academic achievement in Science and Arts subjects of students with different vocational interests?

(iii) Is there a relationship between educational choice and vocational interests?

1.5 Significance of the Study

For Form Six students, the transition from secondary school to college or university and eventually the working world involves numerous and complex educational and career decisions. Empirical evidence demonstrated that an interest inventory can assist individuals in such situations.

The results of this study will provide descriptions that will have implications with respect to educational and vocational planning. By identifying vocational interests through self-rating of competencies, activities, likes and dislikes for various occupations using the SDS, the information can be used to facilitate self-exploration, besides helping students to understand themselves. This will also enable the school counsellor to provide a more focused kind of vocational guidance.

The results of this study will also show if there are any differences in the academic achievement of different subjects based on different vocational interests. This information will enable us to see if students of a particular vocational interest perform better in certain subjects.

This study will help students to choose a course of study that is of interest to them thus ensuring a higher level of success compared to pursuing a course that does not interest them. Students can then make

the right decision regarding their course of study at higher institutions of learning after completing form six.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The sample for this study consists of form six Arts students in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tinggi Klang, Selangor. As the sample is restricted to form six Arts students, the results of this study cannot be generalised to students of other levels of education and will not be representative of Science stream students.

Sample size could also influence the results of this study. Therefore, further research could use a bigger sample that is inclusive of the form six Science classes.

1.7 Definition of Terms

(i) Interests

This refers to what people "like" regardless of ability. According to Layton (1958), the interests of an individual can be defined as his (or her) like for, dislike for, or indifference to something such as an object, occupation, a person, a task, an idea, or an activity. Interests are one aspect of what is broadly considered as the motivation of an individual.

Thus, interests are a part of the person's personality structure or organisation. They are activities for which we have liking or disliking. It can also be defined as liking or disliking state of mind accompanying the doing of an activity, or the thought of performing the activity. (Strong, 1955)

(ii) Occupation

Occupation means employment, calling or pursuit according to the Oxford dictionary (1978). Holland states that the choice of an occupation is an expressive act, which reflects the person's motivation, knowledge, personality and ability. Therefore, occupations represent a way of life, an environment rather than just a set of isolated work functions or skills.

(iii) Personality

Most theoretical definitions view personality as a life-long developmental process, and as an entity accounting for consistent patterns of behaviour. Burger (1986) define personality as consistent behaviour patterns originating within the individual. Rogers described personality in terms of self, an organised, permanent, subjectively perceived entity, which is at the very heart of all our experiences.

Holland's theory states that people can be divided into six personality types or some combination of the six types. They are Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional. The development or emergence of a resemblance to one of the six types is a result of the environment modelling and reinforcing certain behaviours.

(iv) Self-Directed Search (SDS)

The SDS is an interest inventory developed by Holland (1970, 1977) to stimulate vocational counselling through self-rating of competencies, activities, likes and dislikes for various occupations. It was also designed to provide vocational guidance

by helping individuals expand the number of occupational alternatives they might consider when making an initial occupational choice, changing jobs, or considering additional training.

(v) Vocational Guidance

This is a process of helping people select an occupation, which corresponds to their abilities.

According to E.J. Strong (1955), the objective in vocational guidance is to direct the counsellee into an activity from which he can advance to more complex activities. Furthermore, it should point the direction to that starting point most appropriate for the type of complex activities the counsellee is fitted for and will enjoy. In general, his interests indicate how far he will go.

Therefore, vocational guidance helps individuals to work in areas that interest them and enhances job satisfaction.

(vi) Vocational Interests

When the individual's interest is described in relation to occupations or the world of work, we speak of his (or her) vocational interests.

Vocational interests are the basis for career exploration and planning (Johnson R.G., 1971). It gives a person valuable information that could be used to explore occupational alternatives.

(vii) Vocational-Preference Inventory (VPI)

This inventory requires individuals to indicate their vocational interests by selecting job titles that appeal to them. It

was developed by Holland (1953) prior to the SDS and was based on the hypothesis that preferences for occupations are expressions of personality.

Like the SDS, it's a personality inventory consisting of six scales namely – Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional with fourteen occupations for each of the six scales. The higher an individual's score on a scale, the greater the resemblance to the type that scale represents.